

## DEFENSE OF PLACE

A PROJECT OF THE RESOURCE RENEWAL INSTITUTE



## Californians for Western Wilderness

A project of Resource Renewal Institute

December 9, 2005

Dan Leavitt  
Deputy Director  
California High-Speed Rail Authority  
925 L Street, Suite 1425  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Mr. Leavitt,

Defense of Place (DoP) and Californians for Western Wilderness (CalUWild) appreciate the opportunity to comment on the scoping process of the Bay Area to Central Valley EIR/EIS.

Defense of Place works to assure that parks, open space, and wildlife refuges are protected in perpetuity. Defense of Place is active in resource protection campaigns throughout California and the Western United States.

Californians for Western Wilderness is an unincorporated citizens organization with more than 710 members and supporters dedicated to encouraging and facilitating citizen participation in legislative and administrative actions affecting wilderness and other public lands in the West.

DoP and CalUWild are concerned with the impacts that the Bay Area to Central Valley (BACV) section of the high-speed rail (HSR) project will have on protected landscapes including parks, open space, and wildlife refuges (often referred to as Section 4(f) and (6) Resources.) We are also concerned that the high-speed rail will also impact conservation lands such as the Nature Conservancy's Mount Hamilton project and threaten future expansion of such conservation endeavors in the region. Our organizations appreciate the earlier decision that Henry Coe State Park will be left out of any of the potential routes for the Bay Area to Central Valley crossing, but continues to be troubled with the fact that protected landscapes continue to be seen as a viable option for HSR routes. There should be *no* impacts on both 4(f) and 6(f) resources or on other conservation lands.

Californians strongly value their parks, open space, wildlife refuges and other protected lands. California voters have recently supported initiatives giving billions of dollars to further acquire preservation lands for future generations. Propositions 204, 12, 40, and 50 together allocated about \$3.2 billion for a broad array of land acquisition and restoration projects. These allocations include funding to the several state conservancies and the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), as well as for ecosystem restoration, agricultural land preservation, urban forestry, and river parkway programs.<sup>1</sup> California's open, scenic, and wild places are a driving force behind the state's \$80 billion tourism industry.<sup>2</sup> Access to open and protected places is a major factor in attracting businesses, workers and tax paying residents.<sup>3</sup> California clearly values and depends on permanent protection for lands already set aside for preservation.

Support for the California High Speed Rail from the environmental community has been remarkably low for a project with such a multitude of benefits for California's ecosystems. One of the main reasons for this lack of support has been the HSR's potential impact on parks, open space, and wildlife refuges as well the perceived low-priority of protecting these resources by the High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA). While the decision to avoid Henry Coe State Park and its Orestimba Wilderness was a welcome first step, the HSRA should focus on eliminating *all* the direct negative impacts of the HSR on 4(f) and 6(f) resources in the Bay Area to Central Valley corridor. Doing so would gain substantial support for the HSR from the environmental community.

Within the study area there are many federal, state, and locally protected landscapes including, but not limited to: Don Edwards National Wildlife Area, Grasslands Ecological Area, Anderson Lake, George Hatfield State Recreation Area, San Luis State Recreation Area, Cottonwood Creek Wildlife Area, Los Banos Wildlife Area, Ohlone Regional Wilderness, Sunol Regional Wilderness, and Pacheco State Park. Even though some of these areas have not be included in earlier route proposals, Defense of Place would like to bring attention to the presence of these other resources to prevent their inclusion within the new BACV routes. Proposed routes for the BACV corridor must avoid all of the listed resources.

While federal law requires that the impacts on section 4(f) and 6(f) resources be considered in an EIR, which occurred in the FEIR for the HSR, it does not require that protected lands purchased by private conservation groups such as the Nature Conservancy or local land trusts be considered (unless those lands were purchased with funds from LWCF.) Included within the study area are large tracts of land such as the Nature Conservancy's Mount Hamilton project, and other conservation areas protected by private organizations. Conservation organizations and land trusts typically purchase private properties with the intention of either protecting them with a conservation easement or transferring them to public entities. Since lands purchased by conservation could easily become protected 4(f) or 6(f) land within the foreseeable future, the HSR BACV route must avoid these areas.

The routing decisions, and potential station locations of the HSR BACV corridor will have an impact on development growth patterns in Northern California. Because development induced by the HSR will create negative pressures on protected landscapes, those pressures and

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<sup>1</sup> California Legislative Analyst's office

[http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis/2004/resources/res\\_03\\_cc\\_resourcebonds\\_anl04.htm](http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis/2004/resources/res_03_cc_resourcebonds_anl04.htm) 8/5/04

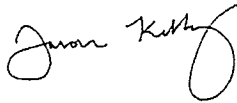
<sup>2</sup> California Lodging Industry Association. <http://www.clia.org/> 8/5/04

<sup>3</sup> Lerner, Steve and Poole, William. "Open Space Investments Pay Big Returns." *Land and People* Spring 1999

impacts must be considered in the EIR/EIS. The HSRA must use existing transportation corridors such as Altamont to minimize the negative impacts of induced development

Again, Defense of Place and Californians for Western Wilderness appreciate the opportunity to comment on the scoping for the Bay Area to Central Valley route of the California High Speed Rail. Please keep us informed of your decision in this matter by sending us the Draft EIR/EIS when it is released, and let us know of further opportunities for involvement in the planning process.

Respectfully submitted,



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